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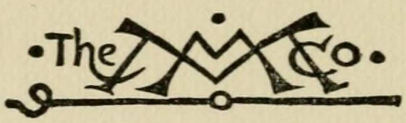
IN LINCOLN'S CHAIR



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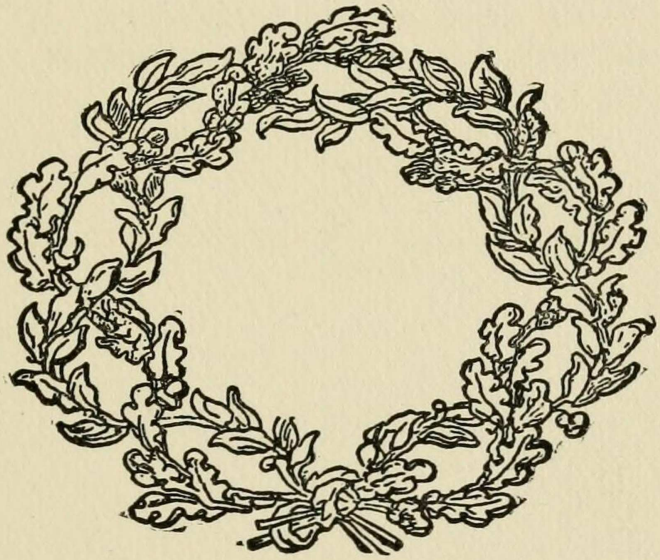
IN LINCOLN'S CHAIR

BY

IDA M. TARBELL

Author of "He Knew Lincoln," "Life of Abraham Lincoln," etc.



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IN LINCOLN'S CHAIR

"YES, sir; he was what I call a *godly* man. Fact is, I never knew anybody I felt so sure would walk straight into Heaven, everybody welcomin' him, nobody fussin' or fumin' about his bein' let in as Abraham Lincoln."

It was Billy Brown talking. We were seated by the stove in his drug store on the public square of Springfield, Illinois, he tilted back in a worn high-back Windsor, I seated properly in his famous "Lincoln's chair," a seat too revered for anybody to stand on two legs. It was a snowy blustery day and the talk had run on uninterruptedly from the weather to the campaign. (The year was 1896, and Billy, being a gold Democrat, was gloomy over politics.) We had finally arrived,

as we always did when we met, at "when Mr. Lincoln was alive," and Billy had been dwelling lovingly on his great friend's gentleness, goodness, honesty.

"You know I never knew anybody," he went on, "who seemed to me more interested in God, more curious about Him, more anxious to find out what He was drivin' at in the world, than Mr. Lincoln. I reckon he was allus that way. There ain't any doubt that from the time he was a little shaver he grabbed on to everything that came his way—wouldn't let it go 'til he had it worked out, fixed in his mind so he understood it, and could tell it the way he saw it. Same about religion as everything else. Of course he didn't get no religious teachin' like youngsters have nowadays—Sunday schools and church regular every Sunday—lessons all worked out, and all kinds of books to explain 'em. Still I ain't sure but what they give so

many helps now, the Bible don't get much show.

"It wa'n't so when Mr. Lincoln was a boy. No, sir. Bible was the whole thing, and there ain't any doubt he knew it pretty near by heart, knew it well before he ever could read, for Lincoln had a good mother, that's sure, the kind that wanted more than anything else in the world to have her boy grow up to be a good man, and she did all she knew how to teach him right.

"I remember hearin' him say once how she used to tell him Bible stories, teach him verses—always quotin' 'em. I can see him now sprawlin' on the floor in front of the fire listenin' to Nancy Hanks tellin' him about Moses and Jacob and Noah and all those old fellows, tellin' him about Jesus and his dyin' on the cross. I tell you that took hold of a little shaver, livin' like he did, remote and not havin' many

books or places to go. Filled you chuck full of wonder and mystery, made you lie awake nights, and sometimes swelled you all up, wantin' to be good.

"Must have come mighty hard on him havin' her die. Think of a little codger like him seein' his mother lyin' dead in that shack of theirs, seein' Tom Lincoln holdin' his head and wonderin' what he'd do now. Poor little tad! He must have crept up and looked at her, and gone out and throwed himself on the ground and cried himself out. Hard thing for a boy of nine to lose his mother, specially in such a place as they lived in.

"I don't see how he could get much comfort out of what they taught about her dyin', sayin' it was God's will, and hintin' that if you'd been what you ought to be it wouldn't have happened, never told a man that if he let a woman work herself to death it was his doin's she died

—not God's will at all—God's will she should live and be happy and make him happy.

"But I must say Mr. Lincoln had luck in the step-mother he got. If there ever was a good woman, it was Sarah Johnston, and she certain did her duty by Tom Lincoln's children. 'Twa'n't so easy either, poor as he was, the kind that never really got a hold on anything. Sarah Johnston did her part—teachin' Mr. Lincoln just as his own mother would, and just as anxious as she'd been to have him grow up a good man. I tell you she was proud of him when he got to be President. I remember seein' her back in '62 or '3 on the farm Mr. Lincoln gave her, little ways out of Charleston. One of the last things Mr. Lincoln did before he went to Washington was to go down there and see his step-mother. He knew better than anybody what she'd done for him.

"Yes, sir, the best religious teachin' Mr. Lincoln ever got was from Tom Lincoln's two wives. It was the kind that went deep and stuck, because he saw 'em livin' it every day, practicin' it on him and his sister and his father and the neighbors. Whatever else he might have seen and learnt, when he was a boy he knew what his two mothers thought religion meant, and he never got away from that.

"Of course he had other teachin', principally what he got from the preachers that came around, now and then. Ramblin' lot they was, men all het up over the sins of the world, and bent on doin' their part towards headin' off people from hellfire. They traveled around alone, sometimes on horseback, sometimes afoot—poor as Job, not too much to wear or to eat, never thinkin' of themselves, only about savin' souls; and it was natural that bein' alone so much, seein' so much misery

and so much wickedness, for there was lots that was bad in that part of the world in them times—natural enough meditatin' as they did that they preached pretty strong doctrine. Didn't have a chance often at a congregation, and felt they must scare it to repentance if they couldn't do no other way. They'd work up people 'til they got 'em to shoutin' for mercy.

"I don't suppose they ever had anybody that listened better to 'em than Mr. Lincoln. I can just see him watchin' 'em and tryin' to understand what they meant. He was curious, rolled things over, kept at 'em and no amount of excitement they stirred up would ever have upset him. No, he wa'n't that kind.

"But he remembered what they said, and the way they said it. Used to get the youngsters together and try it on them. I heard him talkin' in here one day about the early preachin' and I remember his

sayin': 'I got to be quite a preacher myself in those days. You know how those old fellows felt they hadn't done their duty if they didn't get everybody in the church weepin' for their sins. We never set much store by a preacher that didn't draw tears and groans. Pretty strong doctrine, mostly hell-fire. There was a time when I preached myself to the children every week we didn't have a minister. I didn't think much of my sermon if I didn't make 'em cry. I reckon there was more oratory than religion in what I had to say.'

"I reckon he was right about that, allus tryin' to see if he could do what other folks did, sort of measurin' himself.

"Yes, sir, so far as preachin' was concerned it was a God of wrath that Abraham Lincoln was brought up on, and there ain't any denyin' that he had to go through a lot that carried out that idea. A boy

can't grow up in a backwoods settlement like Gentryville, Indiana, without seein' a lot that's puzzlin', sort of scares you and makes you miserable. Things was harsh and things was skimpy. There wa'n't so much to eat. Sometimes there was fever and ague and rheumatiz and milk sick. Woman died from too much work. No medicine—no care, like his mother did. I expect there wa'n't any human crime or sorrow he didn't know about, didn't wonder about. Thing couldn't be so terrible he would keep away from it. Why I heard him tell once how a boy he knew went crazy, never got over it, used to sing to himself all night long, and Mr. Lincoln said that he couldn't keep away, but used to slip out nights and listen to that poor idiot croonin' to himself. He was like that, interested in strange things he didn't understand, in signs and dreams and mysteries.

"Still things have to be worse than they generally are anywhere to keep a boy down-hearted right along—specially a boy like Mr. Lincoln, with an investigatin' turn of mind like his, so many new things comin' along to surprise you. Why it was almost like Robinson Crusoe out there—wild land, havin' to make everything for yourself—hunt your meat and grow your cotton, mighty excitin' life for a boy—lots to do—lots of fun, too, winter and summer. Somehow when you grow up in the country you can't make out that God ain't kind, if he is severe. I reckon that was the way Mr. Lincoln sized it up early; world might be a vale of tears, like they taught, but he saw it was mighty interestin' too, and a good deal of fun to be got along with the tears.

"Trouble was later to keep things balanced. The older he grew, the more he read, and he begun to run up against a

kind of thinkin' along about the time he was twenty-one or twenty-two that was a good deal different from that he'd been used to, books that made out the Bible wa'n't so, that even said there wa'n't any God. We all took a turn at readin' Tom Paine and Voltaire out here, and there was another book — somebody's 'Ruins'— I forget the name."

"Volney?"

"Yes, that's it. Volney's Ruins."

"Do you know I think that book took an awful grip on Mr. Lincoln. I reckon it was the first time he had ever realized how long the world's been runnin'; how many lots of men have lived and settled countries and built cities and how time and time again they've all been wiped out. Mr. Lincoln couldn't get over that. I've heard him talk about how old the world was time and time again, how nothing lasted—men—cities—nations. One set

on top of another—men comin' along just as interested and busy as we are, in doin' things, and then little by little all they done passin' away.

"He was always speculatin' about that kind of thing. I remember in '48 when he came back from Congress he stopped to see Niagara Falls. Well, sir, when he got home he couldn't talk about anything else for days, seemed to knock politics clean out of his mind. He'd sit there that fall in that chair you're in and talk and talk about it. Talk just like it's printed in those books his secretary got up. I never cared myself for all those articles they wrote. Wrong, am I? Mebbe so, but there wa'n't enough of Mr. Lincoln in 'em to suit me. I wanted to know what he said about everything in his own words. But I tell you when I saw the books with the things he had said and wrote all brought together nice and

neat, and one after another, I just took to that. I've got 'em here in my desk, often read 'em and lots of it sounds just as natural, almost hear him sayin' it, just as if he was settin' here by the stove.

"Now what he tells about Niagara in the book is like that—just as if he was here. I can hear him sayin': 'Why, Billy, when Columbus first landed here, when Christ suffered on the Cross, when Moses crossed dry-shod through the Red Sea, even when Adam was first made, Niagara was roarin' away. He'd talk in here just as it is printed there; how the big beasts whose bones they've found in mounds must have seen the falls, how it's older than them and and older than the first race of men. They're all dead and gone, not even bones of many of 'em left, and yet there's Niagara boomin' away fresh as ever.

"He used to prove by the way the water had worn away the rocks that the world

was at least fourteen thousand years old. A long spell, but folks tell me it ain't nothin' to what is bein' estimated now.

"Makes men seem pretty small, don't it? God seems to wipe 'em out as careless like as if He were cleanin' a slate. How could He care and do that? It made such a mite of a man, no better'n a fly. That's what bothered Mr. Lincoln. I know how he felt. That's the way it hit me when I first began to understand all the stars were worlds like ours. What I couldn't see and can't now is how we can be so blame sure ours is the only world with men on. And if they're others and they're wiped out regular like we are, well it knocked me all of a heap at first, 'peared to me mighty unlikely that God knew anything about *me*.

"I expect Mr. Lincoln felt something like that when he studied how old the

world was and how one set of ruins was piled on top of another.

"Then there was another thing. Lots of those old cities and old nations wa'n't Christian at all, and yet accordin' to the ruins it looked as if the people was just as happy, knew just as much, had just as good laws as any Christian nation now; some of them a blamed sight better. Now how was a boy like Lincoln going to handle a problem like that? Well I guess for a time he handled it like the man who wrote about the Ruins. Never seemed queer to me he should have written a free-thinkin' book after that kind of readin'. I reckon he had to write something to get his head clear. Allus had to have things clear.

"You know that story of course about that book. First time I ever heard it was back in 1846 when him and Elder

Cartwright was runnin' for Congress. You know about Cartwright? Well, sir, he made his campaign against Lincoln in '46, not on politics at all—made it on chargin' him with bein' an infidel because he wa'n't a church member and because he said Mr. Lincoln had written a free thought book when he was a boy. He kept it up until along in the fall Mr. Lincoln shut him up good. He'd gone down to where Cartwright lived to make a political speech and some of us went along. Cartwright was runnin' a revival, and long in the evening before startin' home we went in and set in the back of the church. When it came time to ask sinners to come forward, the elder got pretty excited. 'Where be you goin'?' he shouted. 'To Hell if you don't repent and come to this altar.' At last he began to call on Mr. Lincoln to come forward.

Well, you know nobody likes to be called out like that right in meetin'. Mr. Lincoln didn't budge, just set there. The elder he kept it up. Finally he shouted, 'If Mr. Lincoln ain't goin' to repent and go to Heaven, where is he goin'?' Intimatin', I suppose, that he was headed for Hell. 'Where be you goin', Mr. Lincoln?' he shouted.

"Well, sir, at that Mr. Lincoln rose up and said quiet like:

" 'I'm goin' to Congress.'

"For a minute you could have heard a pin drop and then—well, I just snorted —couldn't help it. Ma was awful ashamed when I told her, said I oughtin' to done it—right in meetin', but I couldn't help it—just set there and shook and shook. The elder didn't make any more observations to Mr. Lincoln that trip.

"Goin' home I said, 'Mr. Lincoln, you

just served the elder right, shut him up, and I guess you're right; you be goin' to Congress.'

"'Well, Billy,' he said, smilin' and lookin' serious. 'I've made up my mind that Brother Cartwright ain't goin' to make the religion of Jesus Christ a political issue in this District if I can help it.'

"Some of the elder's friends pretended to think Mr. Lincoln was mockin' at the Christian religion when he answered back like that. Not a bit. He was protectin' it accordin' to my way of thinkin'.

"I reckon I understand him a little because I'm more or less that way myself—can't help seein' things funny. I've done a lot of things Ma says people misunderstand. A while back comin' home from New York I did somethin' I expect some people would have called mockin' at religion; Mr. Lincoln wouldn't.

"You see I'd been down to buy drugs

and comin' home I was readin' the Bible in the mornin' in my seat in the sleepin' car. Allus read a chapter every mornin', Ma got me in the way of it, and I like it —does me good—keeps me from burstin' out at somebody when I get mad, that is, it does for the most part.

"Well, as I was sayin', I was readin' my chapter, and I reckon mebbe I was readin' out loud when I looked up and see the porter lookin' at me and kinda snickerin'.

" 'See here, boy,' I says, 'you smilin' at the Bible. Well, you set down there. Set down,' I says. I'm a pretty stout man as you can see, weigh 200, and I reckon I can throw most men my size. Why, I've wrestled with Mr. Lincoln, yes, sir, wrestled with Abraham Lincoln, right out there in the alley. You see, I ain't used to bein' disobeyed, and that nigger knew it, and he just dropped.

" 'Boy,' I says, 'I'm goin' to read you a chapter out of this Bible, and you're goin' to listen.' And I did it. 'Now,' I says, 'down with you on your knees, we're goin' to have prayers.' Well, sir, you never seen such a scared darky. Down he went, and down I went, and I prayed out loud for that porter's soul and before I was through he was sayin' 'Amen.'

"Of course the passengers began to take notice, and about the time I was done along came the conductor, and he lit into me and said he wa'n't goin' to have any such performances in his car.

"Well, you can better guess that gave me a text. He'd a man in that car fillin' himself up with liquor half the night, just plain drunk and disorderly. 'I ain't heard you makin' any loud objections to the drinkin' goin' on in this car,' I says. 'If that don't disturb the peace, prayin' won't.' And two or three passengers just

chimed right in and said, 'That's so. Do us all good if we had more prayin' and less drinkin'.' Fact was, I was quite popular the rest of the trip.

"Now I reckon some would a been shocked by what I done. Ma said when I told her. 'Now you know, William, it wasn't that porter's soul you was interested in half as much as gettin' a little fun out of him.' Well, mebbe so. I won't deny there was some mischief in it. But it wouldn't have shocked Mr. Lincoln. He'd understood. Seems a pity I can't tell him about that. He'd enjoyed it.

"Well, to go back to Cartwright and the free thought book he said Lincoln wrote when he was a boy. The elder didn't pretend he'd seen the book; said the reason he hadn't was that it was never printed, only written, and that not many people ever did see it because Sam Hill, the storekeeper down to New Salem, thinkin' it

might hurt Lincoln had snatched it away and thrown it into the stove and burnt it up. Now what do you think of that?

"Well, Cartwright didn't get elected—got beaten—beaten bad and nobody around here ever talked about that book when Mr. Lincoln was runnin' for President that I heard of. It was after he was dead that somebody raked up that story again and printed it. It never made much difference to me. I allus thought it likely he did write something along the lines he'd been readin' after. But sakes alive, you ought to seen the fur fly out here. All the church people riz right up and proved it wa'n't so; and those that didn't profess lit in and proved it was so. They got all the old inhabitants of Sangamon County who knew Mr. Lincoln to writin' letters. Lot of them published in the papers.

"One of the most interestin' accordin' to

my way of thinkin' was a letter that came out from Mentor Graham, Lincoln's old school-master. I don't remember it exact, but near as I can recall he said Lincoln asked him one day when he was livin' at his house going to school what he thought about the anger of the Lord, and then he went on to say that he had written something along that line and wished Mr. Graham would read it. Well, sir, Mr. Graham wrote in that letter that this thing Lincoln wrote proved God was too good to destroy the people He'd made, and that all the misery Adam brought on us by his sin had been wiped out by the atonement of Christ. Now mind that was an honest man writin' that letter, a man who'd been Lincoln's friend from the start. To be sure it was some time after the event—pretty near 40 years and I must say I always suspicion a man's remembering anything very exact after 40

years. But one thing is sure, Mentor Graham knew Lincoln in those days, and that's more than most of them that was arguin' this thing did.

"Always seemed to me about as reliable testimony as anybody offered. I contended that most likely Lincoln did write just what Mentor Graham said he did, and that the brethren thought it was dangerous doctrine to make out God was that good, and so they called him an infidel. Nothin' riled those old fellows religiously like tryin' to make out God didn't damn everybody that didn't believe according to the way they read the Scriptures. Seemed to hate to think about Mr. Lincoln's God. I almost felt sometimes as if they'd rather a man would say there wa'n't no God than to make him out a God of Mercy.

"But sakes' alive, Mentor Graham's letter didn't settle it. The boys used to get to rowin' about it in here sometimes

around the stove until I could hardly keep track of my perscriptions. The funniest thing you ever heard was one night when they were at it and an old fellow who used to live in New Salem dropped in, so they put it up to him; said he lived in New Salem in '33; said he knew Lincoln. Wanted to know if he ever heard of his writin' a book that Sam Hill burned up in the stove in his store. The old fellow listened all through without sayin' a word, and when they was finished he said, solemn like, 'Couldn't have happened. Wa'n't no stove. Sam Hill never had one.'

"Well, sir, you ought to seen their jaws drop. Just set starin' at him and I thought I'd die a laffin' to see 'em collapse. I wish Mr. Lincoln could have heard that old fellow, 'Wa'n't no stove.' How he'd enjoyed that—'Wa'n't no stove.'

"But for all that I never regarded that

witness over high. Of course Sam Hill must have had a stove otherwise there wouldn't have been a place for folks to set around.

"It ain't important to my mind what was in that book. What's important is that Abraham Lincoln was wrestlin' in those days to find out the truth, wa'n't content like I was to settle down smotherin' any reservations that I might a had. He never did that, grappled hard with everything touchin' religion that came up, no matter which side it was. He never shirked the church if he wa'n't a member, went regular, used to go to revivals and camp meetings too in those days when he was readin' the 'Ruins.' Most of the boys who didn't profess went to camp meetings for deviltry—hang around on the edges—playin' tricks—teasin' the girls—sometimes gettin' into regular fights. Mr. Lincoln never joined into

any horse play like that. He took it solemn. I reckon he wouldn't ever hesitated a minute to go forward and ask prayers if he'd really believed that was the way for him to find God. He knew it wa'n't. The God he was searchin' for wa'n't the kind they was preachin'. He was tryin' to find one that he could reconcile with what he was findin' out about the world—its ruins—its misery. Clear as day to me that that was what he was after from the start—some kind of plan in things, that he could agree to.

"He certainly did have a lot to discourage him—worst was when he lost his sweetheart. I've allus figured it out that if Ann Rutledge had lived and married him he'd been a different man—leastwise he'd been happier. He might have even got converted and joined the church, like I did after I courted Ma. A good woman sort of carries a man along when he loves

her. It's a mighty sight easier to believe in the goodness of the Lord and the happiness of man when you're in love like I've allus been, and like he was with that girl.

"There was no doubt she was a fine girl —no doubt he loved her. When she died he was all broke up for days. I've heard his old friends tell how he give up workin' and readin'—wandered off into the fields talkin' to himself. Seemed as if he couldn't bear to think of her covered over with snow—beaten on by rain—wastin' away—eaten by worms. I tell you he was the kind that saw it all as it was. That's the hard part of bein' so honest you see things just as they are—don't pretend things are different—just as they are. He couldn't get over it. I believe it's the Lord's mercy he didn't kill himself those days. Everybody thought he was goin' crazy, but I rather think myself he

was wrestlin' with himself, tryin' to make himself live. Men like him want to die pretty often. I reckon he must have cried out many a night like Job did, 'What is mine end that I should prolong my life? My soul chooseth strangling and death rather than life. I loathe it. I would not live alway.'

"He pulled out, of course, but he never got over havin' spells of terrible gloom. I expect there was always a good many nights up to the end when he wondered if life was worth keepin'. Black moods took him and he'd go days not hardly speakin' to people—come in here—set by the stove—not sayin' a word—get up—go out—hardly noticin' you. Boys understood, used to say 'Mr. Lincoln's got the blues.'

"Curious how quick things changed with him. He'd be settin' here, laffin' and jokin', tellin' stories and somebody'd

drop some little thing, nobody else would think about, and suddent his eyes would go sad and his face broodin' and he'd stop talkin' or like as not get up and go out. I don't mean to say this happened often. Of course that wa'n't so; as I've told you no end of times, he was the best company that ever was—the fullest of stories and jokes, and nobody could talk serious like him. You could listen forever when he'd get to arguin', but spite of all that you knew somehow he was a lonely man who had to fight hard to keep up his feelin' that life was worth goin' on with. Gave you queer feelin' about him—you knew he was different from the others, and it kept you from bein' over-familiar.

"There was a man in here the other day I hadn't seen for years—used to be a conductor between here and Chicago—knew him well. It tickled him to death to have me set him in that chair you're in—looked

it all over, said it seemed as if he could just see Mr. Lincoln settin' there. Well, he got to talkin' about all the big bugs that used to travel with him, Little Dug, Judge Davis, Logan, Swett, Welden, and all the rest; and he said something about Mr. Lincoln that shows how he struck ordinary people. He said Lincoln was the most folksy of any of them, but that there was something about him that made everybody stand a little in awe of him. You could get near him in a sort of neighborly way, as though you had always known him, but there was something tremendous between you and him all the time.

"This man said he had eaten with him many times at the railroad eatin' houses. Everybody tried to get near Lincoln when he was eatin', because he was such good company, but they looked at him with a kind of wonder, couldn't exactly

make him out. Sometimes there was a dreadful loneliness in his look, and the boys used to wonder what he was thinkin' about. Whatever it was, he was thinkin' all alone. No one was afraid of him, but there was something about him that made plain folks feel toward him a good deal as a child feels toward his father, because you know every child looks upon his father as a wonderful man.

"There ain't any doubt but there was a good many years after Mr. Lincoln got started and everybody in the state held him high, when he was a disappointed man and when he brooded a good deal over the way life was goin'. Trouble was he hadn't got a grip yet on anything that satisfied him. He hadn't made a go of politics, had quit it. Of course he had plenty of law practice, but, Lord a mighty, you take a town like this was along in the 40's and 50's, when Mr. Lin-

coln was practicin' here, and get right down to what was really happenin', and it was enuff to make a broodin' man like him sick, and want to quit. He had to handle it all, a lawyer does, men fightin' over a dollar, gettin' rich on cheatin', stingy with their wives, breakin' up families, quarrelin' over wills, neglectin' the old folks and yet standin' high in the church, regular at prayer meetin', and teachin' in Sunday School. There was a lot of steady meanness like that all around, and it made him feel bad.

"And then there was dreadful things happened every now and then, men takin' up with girls when they had good wives of their own. There's more than one poor child lyin' over there in the graveyard because some onery old scoundrel got the better of her, and there's more than one good man been put to shame in this town because some woman who was

no better than she ought to be run him down. Lord, it makes you sick, and then every now and then right out of a clear sky there'd be a murder somewhere in the country. Nobody would talk of anything else for days. People who hardly ever opened their mouths would find their tongues and tell the durnedest things.

"It was so all the time Mr. Lincoln was practicin' out here. And it made him pretty miserable sometimes, I reckon, to see so much meanness around. I never knew a man who liked people better'n Mr. Lincoln did—seemed as if he felt the world ought to be happy, and that it could be if people would only do the right thing. You've heard people tellin' how he'd refuse a case often if he didn't think it ought to be brought. Well, sir, that's true. I've heard him argue time and again with the boys about the duty of lawyers to discourage law-

suits. 'It's our business to be peacemakers,' he used to tell 'em, 'not to stir up quarrels for the sake of makin' a little money.' I remember somebody tellin' how they heard him lecturin' a man who'd brought him a case, and pointed out that by some sort of a legal trick, he could get $600. Made Lincoln mad all through. 'I won't take your case,' he said, 'but I'll give you some free advice. You're a husky young man. Go to work and *earn* your $600.'

"I've always figured it out that he was a sight more contented after he got his grip on the slavery question. You know how he felt about slavery; thought it was wrong, and when he began to see there was a chance to fight it in a way that would count, he felt different towards his life, saw it did mean something, began to feel he was some real use. I reckon he began to believe God had a place for him

—that he was put into the world for a good and sufficient reason. Now as I see Mr. Lincoln, that was all he ever needed to reconcile him to things. As he began to see more and more that he had his argument sound, and that it was takin' hold in the country, that men was listenin' to him and sayin' he had it right, why more and more he was something like happy. He made up his mind that the time had come when God meant to say to slavery, 'Thus far and no farther,' and he was ready to put in his best licks to help Him.

"He wrestled with that question till he drove it clean out of politics right down onto bed rock of right and wrong, and there he stood; slavery was wrong, and accordin' to his way of lookin' at it, people who pretended to regulate their lives on religion ought to be agin it. Allus troubled him a lot and sometimes made

him pretty bitter that so many folks that stood high as Christians was for slavery. I remember Newt Bateman tellin' how Lincoln came in his office one day after his nomination—Newt was State School Superintendent, and he and Mr. Lincoln was always great friends,—well, he said Mr. Lincoln came in with a report of a canvass of how people in Springfield were goin' to vote, and he said:

"'Let's see how the ministers in this town are goin' to vote,' and he went through the list pickin' 'em out and settin' 'em down, and, would you believe it now, he found that out of 23 ministers 20 were against him. He was dreadfully upset, and talked a long time about it. Newt said he pulled a New Testament out of his pocket.

"'What I don't understand,' he said, 'is how anybody can think this book stands for slavery. Human bondage can't live

a minute in its light, and yet here's all these men who consider themselves called to make the teachin' of this book clear votin' against me. I don't understand it.

" 'They know Douglas don't care whether slavery's voted up or down, but they ought to know that God cares and humanity cares and they know I care. They ain't been readin' their Bibles right.

" 'Seems to me sometimes as if God had borne with this thing until the very teachers of religion had come to defend it out of the Bible. But they'll find the day will come when His wrath will upset it. I believe the cup of iniquity is full, and that before we get through God will make the country suffer for toleratin' a thing that is so contrary to what He teaches in this Book.'

"As I see it, that idee grew in him. You know how he hated war. Seemed

as if he couldn't stand it sometimes, but there ain't no doubt that more and more he looked at it as God's doin'—His way of punishin' men for their sin in allowin' slavery. He said that more'n once to the country. Remember what he wrote in his call for a fast-day in the spring of '63? No? Well, I've got it here—just let me read it to you."

Billy rose, and after lingering long enough at the window to remark that the "storm wa'n't lettin' up any," went to a scratched and worn desk, a companion piece to "Mr. Lincoln's chair," and took from the drawer where he kept his precious relics a bundle of faded yellow newspapers and selected a copy of the New York *Tribune* of March 31, 1863.

"Now you listen," said Billy, "and see if I ain't right that his idee when he talked to Newt had takin' hold of him deep." So Billy read sonorously the sentences

which seemed to him to demonstrate his point:

" 'Insomuch as we know that by His divine law nations, like individuals, are subjected to punishments and chastisements in this world, may we not justly fear that the awful calamity of civil war which now desolates the land may be but a punishment inflicted upon us for our presumptuous sins, to the needful end of our national reformation as a whole people.'

"Isn't that just what he said to Newt Bateman," Billy stopped long enough to remark.

" 'We have been the recipients of the choicest bounties of Heaven. We have been preserved, these many years, in peace and prosperity. We have grown in numbers, wealth, and power as no other nation has ever grown; but we have forgotten God. We have forgotten the gracious hand which preserved us in

peace, and multiplied and enriched and strengthened us; and we have vainly imagined, in the deceitfulness of our hearts, that all these blessings were produced by some superior wisdom and virtue of our own. Intoxicated with unbroken success, we have become too self-sufficient to feel the necessity of redeeming and preserving grace, too proud to pray to the God that made us:

" 'It behooves us, then, to humble ourselves before the offended Power, to confess our national sins, and to pray for clemency and forgiveness.'

"The longer the war went on, the more and more sure he was that God was workin' out something, and hard as it was for him, the more and more reconciled he got to God's Government. Seems to me that's clear from what he said in his last Inaugural. You remember:

"The Almighty has His own purposes. 'Woe unto the world because of offenses! For it must needs be that offenses come; but woe to that man by whom the offense cometh.' Fondly do we hope, fervently do we pray that this mighty scourge of war may speedily pass away, yet if God wills that it continue until all the wealth piled by the bondsman's two hundred and fifty years of unrequited toil shall be sunk, and until every drop of blood drawn with the lash shall be paid by another drawn with the sword, as was said three thousand years ago, so still it must be said, 'The judgments of the Lord are true and righteous altogether.'

"I like to say that just like he said it. Seems kinda like music. He was that way sometimes, swung into sort of talk and made your heart stop to listen; it was so sweet and solemn-like.

"Makes me ache though to think what

he had to go through to come out where he could talk so sure and calm about things; for certain as he was that God had a purpose in it all, he wa'n't so sure always that he was proceedin' along the lines the Almighty approved of. He never got over that struggle long as he was President, always askin' himself whether he was on God's side. Puzzled him bad that both sides thought God was with 'em. He pointed out more than once how the rebel soldiers was prayin' for victory just as earnest as ours—how the rebel people got the same kind of help out of prayer that the Union people did. And both couldn't be right.

"There isn't any doubt he often tested out whether God agreed with his argument or not, by the way things swung. It was that way about the Emancipation Proclamation. You know how he thought about that for months, and for

the most part kept it to himself. He didn't want to do it that way, was dead set on the North buying the slaves instead of takin' 'em. But he had the Emancipation Proclamation ready, and and he'd told God he'd let it loose if He'd give us the victory. Sounds queer, mebbe, but that's what he did. He told the Cabinet so, and they've told about it. A little mite superstitious, some would say. But Mr. Lincoln was a little superstitious, interested in things like signs and dreams—specially dreams, seemed to feel they might be tryin' to give him a hint. He's told me many a time about dreams he'd had, used to have same dream over and over, never got tired studyin' what it meant. You remember that happened in the war. He'd used to dream he saw a curious lookin' boat runnin' full speed toward a shore he couldn't make out clear, had that dream before nearly all the big

battles—had it the night before they killed him, and told the Cabinet about it —thought it meant there'd be good news from Sherman.

"He got powerful discouraged sometimes, for it did seem the first three years of the war as if the Almighty wa'n't sympathizin' over much with the North. You remember how I told you once of havin' a long talk with him at night that time I went down to Washington to see him. Things was bad, awful bad. Country just plum worn out with the war. People was beginnin' to turn against it. Couldn't stand the blood lettin', the sufferin', and the awful wickedness of it. There was a lot of that feelin' in '64. People willin' to give up anything—let the South go—let her keep her slaves—do anything to put an end to the killin'. I tell you a man has to keep his eyes ahead in war—keep tellin' himself over and over

what's it all about. Mr. Lincoln had to. They were talkin' peace to him, riotin' about the drafts, stirrin' up more kinds of trouble for him than he ever knew there was, I reckon. And he felt it—felt it bad; and that night it seemed to do him good to talk it out. You see I come from home, and I didn't have no connection with things down there, and 'twas natural he'd open up to me as he couldn't to them on the ground; and he did.

" 'I've studied a lot, Billy,' he said, 'whether this is God's side of this war. I've tried my best to figure it out straight, and I can't see anything but that He must be for us. But look how things is goin'.

" 'One thing sure all I can do is to follow what I think's right. Whatever shall appear to be God's will, I'll do. There's quite a number of people who seem to think they know what God wants me to do. They come down every now and

then and tell me so. I must say as I've told some of them that it's more'n likely if God is goin' to reveal His will on a point connected with my duty He'd naturally reveal it to me. They don't all lay it up against me when I talk that way. Take the Quakers. They're good people, and they've been in a bad fix for they don't believe in slavery, and they don't believe in war, and yet it seems to have come to the point that out of this war started to save free government, we're going to get rid of slavery. But they can't accept that way. Still they don't lay it up against me that I do, and they pray regular for me.

" 'We've been wrong, North and South, about slavery. No use to blame it all on the South. We've been in it too, from the start. If both sides had been willin' to give in a little, we might a worked it out, that is if we'd all been willin' to admit

the thing was wrong, and take our share of the burden in puttin' an end to it. It's because we wouldn't or mebbe couldn't that war has come.

" 'It's for our sins, Billy, this war is. We've brought it on ourselves. And God ain't goin' to stop it because we ask Him to. We've got to fulfill the law. We broke the law, and God wouldn't be God as I see Him if He didn't stand by His own laws and make us take all that's comin' to us. I can't think we won't win the war. Seems to me that must be God's way, but if we don't, and the Union is broken and slavery goes on, well, all it means accordin' to my way of seein' things is that the laws ain't satisfied yet, that we ain't done our part. There'll be more trouble until the reason of trouble ends.

" 'But I don't lay it up against God. Billy. What it seems to me He's tryin'

to do is to get men to see that there can't be any peace or happiness in this world so long as they ain't fair to one another. You can't have a happy world unless you've got a just world, and slavery ain't just. It's got to go. I don't know when. It's always seemed to me a pretty durable struggle—did back in '58, but I didn't see anything so bad then as we've come to. Even if I'd known I couldn't have done different, Billy. Even if we don't win this war and the Confederates set up a country with slavery in it, that ain't going to end it for me. I'll have to go on fightin' slavery. I know God means I should.

" 'It takes God a long time to work out His will with men like us, Billy, bad men, stupid men, selfish men. But even if we're beat, there's a gain. There are more men who see clear now how hard it is for people to rule themselves, more peo-

ple determined government by the people shan't perish from the earth, more people willin' to admit that you can't have peace when you've got a thing like slavery goin' on. That's something, that's goin' to help when the next struggle comes.

" 'You mustn't think I'm givin' in, Billy. I ain't, but look how things are goin'. What if we lose the election, and you must admit it looks now as if we would, what if we lose and a Copperhead Government makes peace—gives the South her slaves—lets the "erring sisters" set up for themselves. I've got to think about that, Billy.

" 'Seems to me I can't bear the idea all this blood-lettin' should end that way, for I know lasting peace ain't in that set of circumstances. That means trouble, more trouble, mebbe war again until we obey the law of God, and let our brother man go free.'

"And he just dropped his head and groaned, seemed as if I could hear him prayin', 'Oh, my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me!'

"Think he prayed? Think Abraham Lincoln prayed?" Billy's eyes were stern, and his voice full of reproachful surprise.

"I *know* he did. You wouldn't ask that question if you could have heard him that night he left here for Washington sayin' good-by to us in the rain, tellin' us that without God's help he could not succeed in what he was goin' into—that with it, he could not fail; tellin' us he was turnin' us over to God, and askin' us to remember him in our prayers. Why, a man can't talk like that that don't pray, leastwise an honest man like Abraham Lincoln.

"And he couldn't have stood it without God, sufferin' as he did, abused as he was,

defeated again and again, and yet always hangin' on, always believin'. Don't you *see* from what I've been tellin' you that Abraham Lincoln all through the war was seekin' to work with God, strugglin' to find out His purpose, and make it prevail on earth. A man can't do that unless he gets close to God, talks with Him.

"How do you suppose a man—just a common man, like Abraham Lincoln, could ever have risen up to say anything like he did in '65 in his Inaugural if he hadn't known God:

" 'With malice toward none, with charity for all; with firmness in the right, as God gives us to see the right, let us strive on to finish the work we are in; to bind up the nation's wounds; to care for him who shall have borne the battle and for his widow and his orphan—to do which may achieve a just and lasting peace among ourselves and with all nations.'

"That ain't ordinary human nature—particularly when it's fightin' a war—that's God's nature. If that ain't what Christ had in mind, then I don't read the Bible right.

"Yes, sir, he *prayed*—that's what carried him on—and God heard him and helped him. Fact is I never knew a man I felt so sure God approved of as Abraham Lincoln."

THE END

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